

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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R 141151Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9796

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON UNN

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC HONOLULU

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 0696

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN '75 -- VI

REF: BANGKOK 0277

I. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE THAI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ARE
SCHEDULED FOR 26 JANUARY 1975. THIS IS THE SIXTH OF SEVEN
WEEKLY ELECTION CAMPAIGN SITUATION REPORTS. AS THE CAMPAIGN
ENTERS INTO ITS LAST DAYS, ELECTIONEERING HAS PICKED UP.
SO HAVE ASSASSINATIONS. THE EXTENSIVE FLOODING IN SOUTHERN
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THAILAND AND THE BACKLASH FROM FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM

KITTIKACHON'S ABORTIVE VISIT APPEAR TO BE GROWING INFLUENCES ON THE PROBABLE ELECTION RESULTS. BOTH THE SONGKHLA AND CHIANG MAI CONSULS SUGGEST THAT THE DEMOCRAT PARTY STANDS TO GAIN IF THE FLOOD AND THE ANTI-THANOM BACKLASH CONTINUE TO ELECTION DAY. CHIANG MAI REPORTS THAT THE LOCAL MEDIA IS NOT INFLUENTIAL IN THE ELECTION, AND THAT VOTE BUYING IS NOT AS SURE A METHOD OF WINNING AS IN FORMER DAYS. SEVERAL INCIDENTS ILLUSTRATE THE WEAKNESS OF MOST OF THE 42 PARTIES RUNNING IN THIS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

II. CAMPAIGN INTENSITY AND VIOLENCE

1. AS THE CAMPAIGN ENTERS INTO ITS LAST DAYS, ELECTION-EERING AND PUBLIC INTEREST ARE INCREASING. SO ARE THE BACKERS' INTERESTS. THE THIRD ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF TOLD A CHIANG MAI CONSULATE OFFICER THAT GENERAL KRIT SIWARA CALLED RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS TO BANGKOK FOR A SPECIAL MEETING WHICH THE THIRD ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF BELIEVED WOULD CONCERN ARMY PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS. THE VICE GOVERNOR OF PHISANULOK TOLD A CHIANG MAI CONSULATE OFFICER, HOWEVER, THAT SINCE ARMY UNITS (COMPRISING ABOUT 20,000 MEN) ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE NORTH, THE MILITARY VOTE WOULD LACK THE CONCENTRATION NECESSARY TO AFFECT LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS. (COMMENT: SINCE SOME CONTESTS WILL BE CLOSE, DUE TO THE LARGE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES, THE VICE GOVERNOR'S OPTIMISM MAY BE ILL FOUNDED.)

2. A RECENT SPATE OF POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS TESTIFIES TO THE TENSIONS THE ELECTION HAS RAISED. AFTER A SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY CANDIDATE WAS KILLED IN NAKHON SAWAN PROVINCE, A PARTY SPOKESMAN SAID THAT SEVEN PARTY MEMBERS, INCLUDING SIX CANVASSERS, HAD BEEN SHOT TO DEATH. NEWSPAPERS HAVE ALSO REPORTED INCIDENTS IN WHICH THUGS HAD ROUGHED UP CANDIDATES. WHATEVER THE ROOT OF THE VIOLENCE, THE PUBLIC HAS NOT FOUND A SCAPEGOAT. ELECTION VIOLENCE MAY, THEREFORE, BE ISOLATED ATTEMPTS TO AFFECT VARIOUS LOCAL ELECTIONS RATHER THAN TO DISCREDIT ONE OR ANOTHER PARTY.

III. FLOODS IN THE SOUTH

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3. THE DEVASTATING FLOODS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND HAVE UPSET CAMPAIGN TIMETABLES. CAMPAIGNING HAS COME TO A STANDSTILL IN SOME PROVINCES. SOCIAL ACTION PARTY LEADER M.R. KHUKRIT PRAMOT IS PRESENTLY TRAPPED IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT PROVINCE SINCE HE WAS ON AN ELECTION SWING THROUGH THE SOUGH. REPORTEDLY HE HAS TELEGRAPHED PARTY HEADQUARTERS THAT HE CANNOT LEAVE UNTIL HE PUTS DOWN THE RUMOR THAT HIS PRESENCE

BROUGHT ON THE FLOODING. OTHER CANDIDATES HAVE ASKED THAT THE ELECTIONS BE POSTPONED. SURIN MATDIT, DEMOCRAT PARTY CANDIDATE IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, GAVE A PRESS INTERVIEW PUBLISHED JANUARY 10 IN WHICH HE PREDICTED THAT THE VOTER TURNOUT WOULD DROP AS A RESULT OF THE FLOOD AND THE EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO THE ROADS. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT RICH CANDIDATES WHO GIVE OUT RELIEF SUPPLIES HAVE A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO SWING THE ELECTION IN THEIR FAVOR.

4. THE CONSUL IN SONGKHLA REPORTS THAT THE MONSOONS SHOULD STILL BE GOING STRONG ON ELECTION DAY, DISCOURAGING VOTERS AND OPENING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR BALLOT BOX CHICANERY. LOW RURAL TURNOUT WILL HURT CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATES, ESPECIALLY OLDER ONES WHO HAD CONTACTS WITH THE PREVIOUS REGIME. SONGKHLA FURTHER PREDICTS THAT IF THE TOWNS GET A BIGGER PERCENTAGE THAN USUAL OF THE THE TOTAL TURNOUT, THE DEMOCRAT AND NEW FORCE PARTIES COULD DO BETTER THAN NOW EXPECTED.

IV. THANOM'S RETURN WEAKENS UTPP REMINTS

5. THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS HAVE THE INSIDE TRACK IS NOW UNDER SOME DISPUTE BECAUSE OF THE ABORTIVE RETURN OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKACHON. CHIANG MAI REPORTS THAT FORMER UNITED THAI PEOPLES' PARTY (UTPP) CANDIDATES CONTINUE TO SUFFER FROM THEIR OLD ASSOCIATIONS WITH HIM. CHIANG MAI LISTED UDON TANTISUNTHON (SOCIAL AGRARIAN, TAK PROVINCE), SAN THEPMANI (SOCIAL AGRARIAN, LUMPHUN PROVINCE), BUNYONG WATTHANAPHONG (SOCIAL JUSTICE, UTTARADIT), SONG SANLAYAPHONG (SOCIAL NATIONALIST, UTTARADIT), SOEM LOKLEUNG (THAI NATION, UTTARADIT) AS FRONT RUNNERS UNTIL THANOM'S BRIEF VISIT GAVE THEIR OPPONENTS A STRONG AND EMOTIONAL ISSUE.

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CHIANG MAI CONCLUDES THAT IN MOST CASES DEMOCRAT PARTY CANDIDATES STAND TO DERIVE THE MOST BENEFIT FROM THE WEAKENED POSITION OF THE FORMER UTPP CANDIDATES.

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6. SINCE THE DEMOCRATS AND SIMILAR OPPOSITION ELEMENTS ARE NOT STRONG IN THE NORTHEAST, THE UDORN CONSULATE DOES NOT FEEL THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ANY WEAKNESSES IN THE POSITION OF FORMER UTPP PARLIAMENTARIANS. THE UDORN CONSULATE FINDS IN A PRE-ELECTION REVIEW OF POSSIBLE RESULTS THAT FORMERLY STRONG ESTABLISHMENT CANDIDATES ARE FALLING BEHIND OTHER ESTABLISHMENT PARTY CANDIDATES. UDORN CONCLUDES THAT THE CENTRIST DEMOCRAT, SOCIAL ACTION AND NEW FORCE PARTIES WILL NOT GAIN FROM POPULARITY SLIPPAGES BY LEADING ESTABLISHMENT PARTY CANDIDATES. IN ITS NEW OVERVIEW, UDORN INCREASES TO NINETEEN THE NUMBER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE CANDIDATES IT THINKS WILL WIN FROM THE NORTHEAST AND REDUCES TO SIXTEEN THE NUMBER OF POSSIBLE LEFTIST
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CANDIDATE WINNERS.

V. ROLE OF THE MEDIA; PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

7. THE CHIANG MAI CONSULATE REPORTS THAT THE LOCAL MEDIA WILL HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE ON THE COMING ELECTIONS. THOUGH THE

LAMPANG TELEVISION STATION IS PREPARING PROGRAMS FOR NORTHERN GOVERNORS TO ADDRESS THE POPULATION AND EXPLAIN BALLOT AND VOTING PROCUDURES, THE CANDIDATES ARE NOT TURNING TO TELEVISION CAMPAIGNING. CHIANG MAI SUGGESTS THAT EXCEPT IN A FEW CASES, UPCOUNTRY NEWSPAPERS EXERT LITTLE INFLUENCE ON VOTER PREFECNCES. MOST OF THE NEWSPAPERS HAVE SMALL CIRCULATIONS AND COME OUT EVERY TEN DAYS; THE MORE INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE USUALLY READ THE BANGKOK PRESS.

8. CERTAIN BANGKOK BUSINESSES WITH COMPUTERS REPORTEDLY HAVE CONDUCTED PUBLIC OPINION POLLS. THE MARKET PLANNING SYSTEM DIVISION OF THE KATAMAT COMPANY SAID THAT IN A POLLING OF 4,500 BANGKOK RESIDENTS, 20.95 PERCENT SUPPORT THE DEMOCRAT PARTY, 17.01 SUPPORT SOCIAL ACTION, 12.52 PERCENT NEW FORCE, 6.31 PERCENT THE THAI NATION, 4.8 PERCENT THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND 4.29 THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY. REGARDLESS OF HOW STATISTICALLY VALID THESE OBSERVATIONS MAY OR MAY NOT BE, THEY DO SUPPORT THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT THE RACE IN BANGKOK IS BETWEEN THE DEMOCRATS AND THE SOCIAL ACTION CANDIDATES AND THAT BANGKOK VOTERS WILL REJECT THE PARTIES WHICH ARE THE REMAKES OF THE FORMER REGIME'S UTPP.

VI. VOTE BUYING LESS CERTAIN

9. CHIANG MAI ALSO SUGGESTS THAT BUYING VOTES IS MORE COMPLI-CATED THAN IN PAST ELECTIONS WHEN CANTON HEADMEN OR VILLAGE CHIEFS WOULD DELIVER WHOLE BLOCS. NOW MANY INTEREST GROUPS AND CLANS ARE OFFERING "CAMPAIGN SERVICES" AND COMPETING FOR THE VOTE-BUYING BUDGETS OF WELL HEELED CANDIDATES. BECAUSE OF THE INCREASED COMPETITION, CANDIDATES ARE FINDING VOTE BUYING MORE EXPENSIVE AND LESS RELIABLE THAN BEFORE.

VII. THE WEAK SISTERS

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10. WHEN ONE DOESN'T STAND MUCH OF A CHANCE TO BE ELECTED, ANY GIMMICK MAY HELP. SEVENTEEN BANGKOK CANDIDATES FROM SEVEN POLITICAL PARTIES (SOCIAL JUSTICE, LABOR, DEMOCRACY, PEOPLE'S PROGRESS, PEOPLE'S WORKERS' AND SOVEREIGNTY) PLEDGED IN FRONT OF THE SACRED EMERALD BUDDHA THAT THEY WOULD WORK FOR THE PUBLIC AND FORSWEAR DISHONEST PRACTICES. SUCH CEREMONIES UNDERSCORE THE FACT THAT WHILE THIS ELECTION HAS FEW ISSUES, EACH CANDIDATE MUST WAGE HIS OWN BATTLE AGAINST THE GENERAL THAI SCEPTICISM ABOUT THE EFFICACY OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN GENERAL.

11. SOME OF THE SMALLER POLITICAL PARTIES FACE PROBLEMS OF

MERE SURVIVAL. THE LABOR (KAMMAKON) PARTY WHICH
PUT UP 16 CANDIDATES, OR LESS THAN ONE PERCENT OF THE TOTAL
NUMBER OF HOPEFULS, SUFFERED A SPLIT WHICH SAW OVER HALF
OF ITS CANDIDATES FOLLOW PARTY LEADER THANONG LAOWANIT IN
A WALK OUT ON THE PARTY FOUNDER TOI TANGSA-NGA. THANONG
CLAIMED THAT TOI IS BANKRUPT AND WANTS TO SELL THE
PARTY. OTHER REASONS FOR THANONG'S WALKOUT MAY RELATE TO HIS
EMPLOYMENT AT THE BUNROD BREWERY, WHICH HAS FINANCIAL
CONNECTIONS TO THAI MILITARY LEADERS AND CHINESE BUSINESS-
MEN WHO SUPPORT OTHER POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS. THIS LITTLE
CRISIS MAY LET ONE OF THAI POLITICS' FORTY TWO BOTTLES OF
BEER FALL OFF THE WALL.
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